

Introductory Remarks at

An Africa-Canada-UK Exploration:  
Building Science & Technology Capacity with African Partners

Canada House  
London, England  
January 31, 2005

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Thank you, Mel and David, for a spirited and warm welcome to Canada House — a beautiful venue in which to hold a two-day learning discussion on building Science and Technology capacity with African partners.

Good morning, Honourable Ministers, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen.

It is a great pleasure to be here with you today, and I look forward to two days of exciting discussion helping us all to see more clearly how we can most effectively contribute to building science and technology capacity with African partners — a capacity which we believe is paramount in all societies if they are to control their own development based on knowledge.

I have been asked to make a few introductory remarks, and remind you of the purpose of this workshop. Let me say how pleased I am to see such a wide array of partners from Africa, the UK, and Canada, and from other organizations, such as the US National Academy of Sciences, Gates Foundation, Rockefeller Foundation, and multilateral institutions such as UNESCO, the World Bank, and the European Commission.

Canada's International Development Research Centre was established by Act of the Canadian Parliament in 1970 to help strengthen capacity for research and innovation in developing countries. It is a public corporation that reports to Parliament through the Minister of Foreign Affairs; it is governed and guided by an international Board of Governors — eleven Canadian, ten non-Canadian. At any one time, we usually have two or three African governors, most recently from Kenya and Mali. From the UK, we benefited for many years from the wise counsel of the Sir Geoffrey Wilson, an ex Permanent Secretary for ODA, and are now fortunate enough to have Ged Davis. Our Board is a direct reflection of IDRC's philosophy, which is to convene people from different backgrounds and nationalities to work together.

IDRC's basic premise has always been that a country can develop only when it has the capacity to use science to address its own problems and to make decisions, often with respect to policy and resource allocation, on the basis of locally relevant evidence.

Our support to capacity building has usually meant providing African researchers with the resources to undertake research themselves so as to contribute practical solutions to their own countries' development challenges. This can vary from understanding drought tolerance in crops, to showing the beneficial effects of using bed nets to ward off malaria-carrying mosquitoes, to showing how health systems can be organized to provide better service to their populations, to exploring how information and communication technologies can benefit poor people and improve their opportunities for development.

And, of course, researchers learn by doing in the process of discovering significant results for their fellow citizens. We have also supported more formal elements of training and institution building, but the key has been to empower African scientists to do the work themselves and to do so in the context of application. This still seems to me to be of cardinal importance.

When appropriate — and usually when requested by our African partners — we have also sponsored collaborative research between Canadian and African scientists.

I think that there are a few simple lessons from experience common to many of us here that will recur in our workshop:

First, external efforts to build S&T capacity must be responsive to clearly-articulated needs expressed by each country. Support must be tailored to these needs and conditions.

Second, within a framework determined by each country, external actors must coordinate their efforts more effectively than in the past. .

Third, social, scientific and technical innovation must go hand in hand if societies are to reap the benefits from S&T.

In introducing the purpose and objectives of the workshop, let me start by putting it in the context of activities taking place in a number of different settings.

The impetus for the workshop came in June 2003 from discussions held among IDRC, the High Commissions in Ottawa and London, and DFID. These consultations preceded IDRC's presentation to the UK House of Commons Committee inquiry into the use of science in UK international development policy.

### **Why Africa, Canada and the UK?**

The UK and Canada both see support to Africa's development as a priority for their international development efforts. Both have committed themselves through the G-8 process to developing and supporting the Action Plan of the New Partnership for African

Development. The UK has taken the major initiative of establishing the Commission for Africa, and Canada is honoured to have its Minister of Finance serving as a Commissioner along with the UK Chancellor, African ministers, and other colleagues.

The African research community has been working in partnership with UK and Canadian institutions for many years through a variety of initiatives, ranging from university linkages to public-private partnerships in health and agriculture to research networks. The NEPAD agenda involves partnerships with DFID, IDRC, CIDA (the Canadian International Development Agency), and the Royal Society of London, for example, in addition to the high-level links of the G8 Africa Action Plan.

Both the UK and Canada are in the midst of exploring how to make the most effective link between domestic S&T capacity and development assistance in a way that is of maximum benefit to our African partners — in terms of research results and capacity building. Sir David King, the UK Chief Scientific Advisor, and Dr. Arthur Carty, the Canadian National Science Advisor (who are both here today), are the leaders in our respective countries, and we will be hearing from them this afternoon.

As contributions to this exploration, I know that the UK, under the Department for International Development (DFID), has a new Research Consultations Framework; I note as well the House Select Committee for S&T inquiry into the role of science in international development. I have to tell you also that we are delighted that DFID has appointed a Chief Scientific Adviser, and doubly so that it is someone with the international reputation and experience of Gordon Conway.

In Canada, IDRC and CIDA are strengthening their respective linkages and initiatives for African capacity: the Canadian International Development Agency's support to the Biosciences Eastern and Central Africa facility based in Nairobi and housed at the International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI); and IDRC's support for the NEPAD S&T action plan and the African Technology Policy Studies network. We will hear more about some of this work over the next two days.

So, we all have a great deal in common. We believe in Africa, we support African-led initiatives, and we are committed in the long-term to Africa's development, and the role of science and technology in that development.

The overall purpose of this workshop is to bring together African, British, and Canadian experts, policy-makers, the research community, and users to discuss how to work more effectively in building S&T capacity with African partners.

Specifically, our objectives are:

- To identify good practices and build upon lessons learned from existing mechanisms for building S&T capacity with Africa.

- To draw conclusions as to how capacity building can best be undertaken in the future.
- To identify how domestic structures, governance, and incentives are best organized to maximize capacity building with Africa.
- To provide policy-oriented inputs aimed at decision-makers in Africa, Canada, and the UK, as well as multilateral fora.

We have exciting material before us. On your behalf, please allow me to thank the organizers, including my fellow colleagues at IDRC, the UK High Commission to Canada, the UK Department for International Development (DFID), the UK Office of Science and Technology, and, last but not least, our host for this event, the Canadian High Commission, for their generous hospitality, their support, and the splendour of Canada House, a crown jewel of Canada.